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Atari Online News, Etc.
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->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
"""""""""""""""""""""""""""""

Well, I managed to survive my first week back from vacation without any visible scars! As usual, it took me about a day to dig out my desk of mail and other paperwork. It takes me about a week to sort it all out and get caught up. Never a fun task, but under the circumstances...

So, I've been spending the week getting caught up, and trying to keep everything else organized and running smoothly - both at home and work. It's been one really hot and humid week, so our energy levels have been at a minimum. Maybe we'll be back to "normal" by the end of the weekend! So, for now, I'll keep this short and get right to this week's issue.

Until next time...

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MagicMac X Updated

Nils Feske has announced:

The MacOS version of the commercial multitasking OS Magic called"MagiC Mac" has been updated to version 1.2. You can downloaded the new version on the website of the software house ASH.

URL: http://www.application-systems.de/magicmacx/

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING

compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. Well, the trials and tribulations of the past week have lessened somewhat, and my head is finally spinning a bit more slowly.

In case you have no idea of what I'm talking about, my father-in-law passed away last week, and the process of getting things in order is now well underway.

My father-in-law was 85 years old, and to him computers were still the stuff of science fiction. He could never quite wrap his mind around the idea of instant messaging or email was just beyond him.

A childhood friend of his, now living down south, does use a personal computer for various tasks like genealogy, and gave my father-in-law his email address. "What the heck and I going to do with this", my father-in-law asked rhetorically.

Well, I took the email address and set up an email account for him and typed out emails to his buddy as he dictated them. That's as close as he ever got to the information age, I'm afraid, but it did make for a few interesting conversations.

Once, when he was in a particularly inquisitive mood, he asked me, "How far can you sent one of those email things?"

"Half way around the world", I told him. "How come only HALF way", he asked.

"Because after that", I explained, "you're coming back!"

He chuckled, but I don't think he really got it. But that's not really important. The important part is that he got to converse with an old friend; someone he'd been friends with for more than three quarters of a century, and got to see at least a little glimpse of my world.

Well, let's get to the news, hints, tips and info from the UseNet.

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup

Here's an interesting one. Patrice Mandin asks about the differences between TOS versions:

"For a wiki currently in the works, I need a bit of information about various TOS versions:

ST: 1.00
MegaSTE: 2.02,2.62
TT: 3.01,3.05,3.06
Falcon: 4.00,4.01,4.03
Medusa/Hades/Milan: any version

For each version, I need date of creation, language/country, gemdos version and aes version. You can have it with any sysinfo-type program. Thanks.

You can have a look at the current page there:
http://removers.free.fr/wikipendium/wakka.php?wiki=TOS "

Gerhard Stoll supplies the following info:

"

Version	Date	Name	Language	Kind	GEMDOS	AES	
0.00		Das Boot	englisch	ROM			
1.00	20.06.1985	Mushroom	deutsch	RAM	0.13	1.01	
1.00	20.11.1985		deutsch	RAM	0.19	1.2	
1.00	20.11.1985		franz.	RAM	0.19	1.2	
1.00	06.02.1986	Altes	deutsch	RAM	0.19	1.2	
1.00	06.02.1986	Altes	deutsch	ROM	0.19	1.2	
1.02	22.04.1987	Blitter	deutsch	ROM	0.19	1.2	
1.04	18.05.1988	Beta-Test	englisch	RAM	0.21	1.3	
1.04	08.08.1988	Developer	deutsch	RAM	0.21	1.04	
1.04	22.02.1989	Rainbow	deutsch	ROM	0.21	1.4	
1.04	06.04.1989	Rainbow	deutsch	ROM	0.21	1.4	
1.06	19.06.1989	STE	deutsch	ROM	0.21	1.4	
1.62		STE					
2.05	05.12.1990		deutsch	ROM			
2.06	14.11.1991		deutsch	ROM			
2.06	10.03.1992		deutsch	ROM			(1)
2.95	26.04.1996		englisch	ROM	0.20	3.20	(2)
3.00	01.03.1990	TTOS		ROM			
3.01	29.08.1990	TTOS	deutsch	ROM			
3.05	05.12.1990	TTOS	deutsch	ROM			
3.06	24.09.1991	TTOS	deutsch	ROM	0.20	3.20	
4.04	08.03.1993		multi	ROM			
4.07	10.05.1999	MilanTOS	multi	Flash			
4.08	08.07.1999	MilanTOS	multi	Flash	0.32		
4.08	15.06.2001	MilanTOS	multi	Flash	0.33	3.42	
4.08	20.08.2001	MilanTOS	multi	Flash	0.33	3.42	
4.08	06.10.2002	MilanTOS	multi	Flash	0.33	3.43	
4.08	09.03.2003	MilanTOS	multi	Flash	0.33	3.43	
7.0x			multi	Flash			(3)

(1) STBook
(2) Tos2Win
(3) CENTurbo II, a modified version of 4.04

Without warranty, because I have not all of them.

It is great that we make all things twice. "

Peter West asks Gerhard:

"Where in TOS .HYP did you find this? I can’t find it in mine. Or is yours a different version? Mine is 1.70 by Zorro according to the Info panel.

The listing above is, of course, incomplete since most of the TOSs were available in many language versions. (See for instance the chip numbers listed in the Chips ’n ChipsX Index: ’TOS Versionen’)."

Gerhard replies:

"I think we talk about different text.

--------------------------------cut--------------------------------
ftp: //chapelie.rma.ac.be/atari/docs/tos_hyp/tos_493_hyp_en.zip

(1.721.256 bytes) tos.hyp English version
--------------------------------cut-------------------------------- "

Peter Feddersen takes the opportunity to ask:

"I have two MEGA STe's. One with an English TOS 2.06 and one with TOS 2.05 in german.

I want to reprogram the German TOS 2.05 with the english one. Is it legal?

How do I make two separate binary files containing the English TOS2.06, both EE and EO?

I have tried a number of TosDump programs, but they only seem to generate one single *.img file containing both EPROMS (mainly for use in emulation programs)!

Any help would be appreciated!"

Coda tells Peter:

"Either use an eprom programmer to dump each chip separately, or get a program off the net that will split the TOSDUMP image into its high and low counterparts. If you are sending the eproms and code to someone to burn them, they will probably do this for you anyway."

Rory McManon asks for help with his sleeping keyboard:

"I was just using my falcon when the keyboard stopped working.

It's something on the motherboard because I tested the keyboard on another falcon and it works fine. I tested the connector on the motherboard on the keyboard connector where 5v should be and it's not there. I could not see a fuse or anything near the keyboard connector to check or replace."

Mark Duckworth tells Rory:

"Well an easy but improper way would be to solder a wire from another 5V source to it. If you probe the board in that area (+ end of big capacitors) you can find another source. You must have had a short or something and there must be a fuse or something blown. Rodolphe would know best."

Joakim Högberg adds:

"I think it may be the same issue as was discussed in [an] old thread:

I have had the same prob you are seeing, and managed to take 5v from

another source. Not 100% sure it was the exact same pin as is described in the posting that the above URL is pointing to."

'Phantom' tells Rory:

"If you take 5v from another source and it makes the keyboard work then it may be alright to use it like that.

However, If possible I would try to discover what caused the problem as another part of the Falcon may also be affected by this problem.

If you are not getting power at the pins were the keyboard connects to the motherboard. It is possible that you have a broken solder joint under one or more of the connecting pins.

You could try carefully moving each pin and see if any seem loose. And if you want to do a more careful look. Take the case apart and look under the board were the pins are to see if you have a broken solder joint.

If all seems well then we need to find out where the tracks of these pins goes to next and look there for trouble.

If you have the case apart or have the proper Falcon diagrams, then we could track them back to the next component and so on.

However I feel that its probably a broken track or bad solder joint, like what happens with the Mouse and Joystick ports. The solder joints get worked loose from unplugging the mouse and joysticks.

If you have done work on your Falcon before and have removed the keyboard a few times. It could be the same thing.

If you have a soldering Iron and some solder, and the time. I would go over each joint and see if that fixes the problem. If it doesn't, then thats one thing out of the way.

Generally thats how you fix problems like this, unless you know for sure what's causing it.

You eliminate what could be causing the problem and what's left is usually the problem that needs fixed.

If you do go for the 5v fix from another source. Just notice if you have any problems with any programs when running the machine."

Rory checks some things out and posts:

"I ran 5v from another point and the keyboard lit up. However the keyboard is sending keystrokes to the motherboard, but they are not registering to the motherboard. The HD spinup bar will shrink to nothing despite pressing the keyboard. The keyboard is good as it works on another falcon. I think there might something a little more serious. Rodolphe any ideas or should I send the board? 68B50?"

Ronald Hall jumps in and asks Rory:

"I know this is a dumb question, so forgive me for asking, but it is plugged onto the keyboard header correctly, right?

Reason I ask is I made the same mistake myself when I was re-casing my Falcon in a Wizztronics rack case.

It acted something like you describe."

Well folks, that's all for this week. It's time for me to console my wife again. The up-side is that, since I have to remain the 'strong' one, I'm not falling apart myself. That'll come later, once she's recovered to some extent.

Tune in again next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - GTA Changes To Adult-Only!
Game Mods Under Scrutiny!
Doom Goes Hollywood!
And much more!

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!

Sony's PSP Goes Online

Sony Computer Entertainment will release a system software update for its PlayStation Portable (PSP) next week that will add several new functions to the handheld gaming device, including browse the Internet and download TV programs, the company said Thursday.

Chief among the additions to version 2.0 of the software will be a Web browser. Accessible from the PSP's main menu, the browser supports HTML 4.01 and will allow access to most Web sites.

The PSP already has a wireless LAN for online gaming and for downloading software from the Internet, but Sony hasn't officially allowed users to browse the Web. However, users quickly found a way to exploit a Web browser included in the "Wipeout Pure" game to enable access to Web sites. Instructions for doing this can be found easily on the Internet, but the

software update will make Web browsing both official and much easier.

Also new will be support for downloading video in the MPEG4 AVC format. This was demonstrated at an event in Tokyo Thursday by connecting a PSP with the new software to a PSP portal site that will be launched next week by SoNet, a Sony-affiliated Internet service provider in Japan. The portal will offer downloads of TV programs and other content. Prices for the service were not disclosed.

Other new features include the capability to transfer photos from one PSP to another via an ad hoc wireless LAN, and support for additional media formats including the AAC audio format.

The version 2.0 software update will be available via the PSP's built-in update function or in UMD (Universal Media Disc) form from July 27, the company said. Information on whether the update will be simultaneously available to users outside Japan was not immediately available.

Sony also announced plans to launch a white PSP, called the PSP-1000KCW. At present the console is available only in black. The white version will be available in Japan starting on September 15. A value pack that includes the PSP, headphones, a memory card and other accessories will cost $220, which is the same price as the black PSP. International launch plans were not disclosed.

Majesco Ships Pulse-Pounding 'Nanostray' for Nintendo DS

Launching its first title for the Nintendo DS handheld system, Majesco Entertainment Company, an innovative provider of digital entertainment products and content, today announced it has shipped Nanostray, an addictive 3D shooter developed by Shin'en.

"We are thrilled to bring the first 3D shooter to the Nintendo DS," said Ken Gold, vice president of Marketing for Majesco. "Nanostray looks great, utilizes the touch screen functionality and wireless link features of the Nintendo DS and will provide consumers with an exciting game play experience."

An intense, pulse-pounding 3D shooter, Nanostray offers touch screen support, local area network play, an arsenal of weapons and beautifully designed environments. Additional highlights include:

* Five exciting modes of play such as:
  - Adventure Mode -- straight, one-player shooter fun across 8 different stages;
  - Arcade -- play individual stages for high-score honors;
  - Challenge -- 22 challenges to unlock in Arcade mode;
  - Multiplayer -- a two-player, wireless link battle extravaganza;
  - Gallery/Jukebox -- allows players to unlock artwork, models and songs from the game.

* Heads-Up Display instantly shows players enemy locations and weapon-types; information on player ship and weapon status and score;

* Touch screen features such as boss scanning, on-the-fly weapon management, and a live radar;

* Wide array of powerful weapons with corresponding sub-weapon like Seekers, Pulses, Single-shots and Lightning;

* Cool variety of multi-player modes and options included timed battles, sudden death, and bonus races.

Developed exclusively for Nintendo DS by Shin'en, the creators of the Iridion Game Boy Advance series, Nanostray is now available for a suggested retail price of $29.99.

'Doom' Film Shoots for Video Game Style

A movie version of classic video game series "Doom" takes some visual cues from the world of games, according to a clip of the film shown on Sunday.

The original "Doom" was one of the first video game runaway successes when it debuted more than a decade ago and it helped establish the first-person-shooter genre in which killing aliens, mutants or demons is central to the plot.

In first-person-shooters, the player often looks at the world down a gunsite, and that is exactly the point of view in part of the movie, according to a clip shown at the Comic-Con convention in San Diego.

The movie starring Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson follows a team battling demons on Mars, where a research lab experimenting has discovered horrible secrets. In a clip from the unfinished movie, the camera closes in on an eye of a soldier - and then "turns around" and begins watching the world and telling the tale from the soldier's point of view.

A cheer went up through the video-game fan crowd as two hands reached up in front of the screen and shoved ammunition into a gun a typical player point-of-view shot. The camera then continued from the shooter's point of view as he wandered through a dark building, blasting and blowing up demons jumping in from every angle.

The original "Doom" was launched in 1994 by developer id Software and last year publisher Activision Inc. released "Doom 3," with a similar plot line as the new movie. Universal Pictures, controlled by General Electric Co., plans to open the movie on Oct. 21, 2005.

Resident Evil 5 Coming to 360, PS3

Since January, GameCube owners have been the only American gamers who have been able to enjoy Resident Evil 4. But while the best-selling, critically lionized title will arrive on US PlayStation 2s until the fall, it looked like Xbox owners would never be able to help Leon S. Kennedy slay the series' signature undead hordes.

However, Capcom announced Resident Evil 5 is coming to Microsoft's next-generation console, the Xbox 360, as well as Sony's PlayStation 3. The announcement came in the form of a press release on the English-language section of the Investor Relations part of Capcom's Japanese corporate Web site.

The news came as only a small surprise, as Capcom executives had declared their admiration for both Sony and Microsoft's next-gen consoles when they were unveiled in mid-May. "Utilizing the PlayStation 3's and Xbox 360's unprecedented power, Resident Evil 5 promises to revolutionize the series by delivering an unbelievable level of detail, realism, and control," read the release.

The announcement of an Xbox 360 Resident Evil 5 does mark an increasing change of heart for Capcom. Traditionally, the company has only given Microsoft's current-generation console, the Xbox, tepid support in the form of re-releases of older titles such as Genma Onimusha. However, that changed this E3, with the unveiling of Beat Down: Fists of Vengeance and Final Fight: Streetwise, two top holiday titles which will ship on the Xbox and PlayStation 2 simultaneously.

Capcom's brief announcement did not mention a ship date for Resident Evil 5 for the Xbox 360, which is due in Q4 2005, or the PlayStation, which currently has a "Spring 2006" launch window. American Capcom reps told GameSpot that they "do not have any further details at this time" on the announced versions or a potential version for Nintendo's Revolution, which was not mentioned in the release.

However, Nintendo fans shouldn't give up hope entirely. Resident Evil 4 spent nearly four years in development, meaning that Resident Evil 5 likely won't arrive before the Revolution's expected late 2006 launch. Given that the Revolution development kits went out in March, a version of the game could still be in development for the mystery-shrouded console.

While Capcom's release had little information on Resident Evil 5, the latest issue of Famitsu revealed many details about the game. It features an interview with the game's producer, Jun Takeuchi, best known as the producer of Genma Onimusha and Onimusha 3. He also worked on Resident Evil 1 and 2, handling character animation and directing the creation of gun models.

Images of Resident Evil 5 featured in the magazine shows that the series' setting has dramatically changed. Instead of the creepy dark atmosphere of previous installments, RE5 takes place in a hot and sandy desert city under a pounding sun. There are also scenes of unlit areas such as alleyways and buildings which sport the same shadowy atmosphere as previous installments.

The Famitsu images show an unshaven man in a short-sleeved shirt who appears to be the main character in Resident Evil 5. Armed with a handgun and knife belted to his shoulder, he is outnumbered and being chased by a mysterious group of enemies shown in silhouette.

Takeuchi commented that RE5's setting was inspired by the 2001 war movie Black Hawk Down, in which a crowd of angry Somalis swarms over an American helicopter after it crash-lands. Technically, the surviving soldiers have a lot of room to run inside the city, but are quickly cornered by the massive crowd that comes after them. Takeuchi says that he hopes to achieve a similar kind of experience and "madness" in RE5.

When asked about the unshaven man, Takeuchi said that the core developers for RE5 include staff members that worked on RE1, hinting that it might possibly be Chris Redfield from the original Resident Evil. Takeuchi also revealed that RE5 will be an authentic sequel to the series' main storyline rather than a side story. He added that if the main character is indeed Chris, the developers might be preparing to create some kind of a conclusion to the series' long storyline.

In terms of the mysterious enemies, Takeuchi commented that they are only displayed in shadows because they will feature new elements that can't be disclosed yet. However, he hinted that the talking enemies in Resident Evil 4 were something he hopes to expand on in RE5.

As expected, Resident Evil 5 will take advantage of the PS3 and Xbox 360's high-definition graphics. Takeuchi said that one of the main goals of RE5's development was to use said graphics to deliver a tangible "atmosphere" to the game, to the point where the player can almost feel the hot air of the desert.

When asked about how RE5 will actually play, Takeuchi said that he hopes to bring back RE4's gameplay in RE5. He commented that Resident Evil 4 caused a lot of excitement at Capcom, since director Shinji Mikami had successfully made major changes while still keeping the essence of the series intact.

When Takeuchi was asked about the game's release, he avoided giving a straight answer, only stating jokingly that it will come out "before the launch of PlayStation 4." Later, Takeuchi explained that projects for next-generation consoles will easily spend three to five years in development, and that work on RE5 is expected to take a bit of time, since it's currently Capcom's main focus.

Capcom may exhibit a one- to two-minute High Definition trailer of Resident Evil 5 at the Tokyo Game Show, which is where the images of the game in Famitsu were taken from.

'GTA' Game Rating Changed to Adults-Only

The video game industry on Wednesday changed to adults-only the rating of "Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas," a best-selling title in which explicit sexual content can be unlocked with an Internet download.

The decision followed intense pressure from politicians and media watch groups.

Grand Theft Auto's producer, Rockstar Games, said it was now working on a new version of the game that would satisfy the original "M" for mature rating. It said it would provide new labels to any retailer willing to continue selling the version currently on store shelves.

Rockstar's parent, Take Two Interactive, also admitted for the first time Wednesday that the sex scenes had been built into the retail game - not just the PC version but also those written for Xbox and PlayStation2 consoles.

Company officials had previously suggested that a modification created by outsiders added the scenes to the game, last year's best seller in consoles.

"There is sex content in the disc," Take-Two spokesman Jim Ankner told The Associated Press. "The editing and finalization of any game is a complicated task and it's not uncommon for unused and unfinished content to remain on the disc."

The sex scenes, inserted in a game whose main character seeks bloody vengeance on gang-filled streets while pickup scantily clad women, had prompted outrage from parent's groups and politicians including Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton, D-N.Y.

In a statement, the president of the Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) said the sex scenes were programmed by Rockstar "to be inaccessible to the player."

But ESRB chief Patricia Vance also acknowledged that the "credibility and utility" of the industry-run board's initial "M" rating had been "seriously undermined."

Many retailers sell "M" rated games, which "may be suitable for persons ages 17 and older," according to the rating board. but won't sell "AO"-labeled games at all.

Take-Two also said Wednesday that it expects to suffer financially. It lowered its expectations for its current quarter and fiscal year to set aside funds for returns of the games, and figured that net sales could decrease by more than $50 million during the quarter ending July 31.

Shares of Take-Two rose 12 cents to close at $27.07 on the Nasdaq, but later dropped $3.07, or 11.3 percent, in after-hours activity.

The ratings change was vindication for Patrick Wildenbourg, the Dutch programmer who developed and freely distributed the modification that unlocked the controversial content in the game's PC version.

Such "mods" are wildly popular in the hardcore gaming community and - authorized or not - exploit the medium's interactive nature to extend the playing life of many popular titles.

Take-Two president Paul Eibeler stressed in a statement that only an unauthorized "mod" makes the sex scenes available, and said "the decision to re-rate a game based on an unauthorized third party modification presents a new challenge for parents, the interactive entertainment industry and anyone who distributes or consumes digital content."

That prompted an angry reaction from David Walsh, founder of the National Institute on the Media and the Family, a Minneapolis-based group that monitors the industry.

Walsh criticized Rockstar for what he called a "carefully worded statement" that leaves the impression that "modders" are responsible for the content. "They did not take responsibility for the fact that this code was created within their company and placed on disks and shipped to responsible retailers."

The Parents Television Council, another group that monitors sex and violence in the media, said it was pleased with the rating switch but called on Rockstar to voluntarily recall the game and offer refunds to anyone who purchased it.

"I tip my cap to that first step of showing responsibility," said Tim Winter, the council's executive director. "Phase two needs to be absolutely getting to the bottom of this coding issue. How did it get into that game? How did it get past the ratings board?"

The ESRB was formed 11 years ago amid congressional pressure to crack down

on violent video games. The board now issues ratings for more than 1,000 game titles each year.

Game makers must submit a lengthy form describing the most extreme content, and turn over visual samples and scripted dialogue as each game nears the final stages of development.

Atari Gets Tagged

Vallone Calls for Boycott of Video Game Maker

New York City Council Member Peter F. Vallone, Chair of the Public Safety Committee and leader of the fight against graffiti, has called for Atari to scrap plans to release a graffiti based video game that is described as "a groundbreaking graffiti game play system, designed to sharpen your skills as you tag with aerosol spray cans, rollers, markers, stickers and stencils."

"From what Atari's putting out, it appears they want to make crime exciting and to teach children how to get away with breaking the law," stated Vallone, a former prosecutor. "I'm just glad they aren't giving out cans of spray paint with this game."

"I think irresponsible corporations like Atari must get the message loud and clear, we don't want them supporting criminals and punks and if they do we won't support them."

Atari has announced that they plan on releasing "Getting Up: Contents Under Pressure" in September 2005. In this game players are encouraged to break the law by destroying property and hiding from the police. Vallone is threatening a boycott of Atari if they decide to release this irresponsible game.

"I think Atari will soon learn that they are going to be a 'Company Under Pressure,'" threatened Vallone.

Vallone recently blasted Time Magazine for promoting graffiti by displaying a gigantic billboard with various art and tags by infamous graffiti artists. One of these vandals Time hired had a long criminal record and was paid over $20,000 for his efforts. Vallone also called on Time to donate at least $20,000 for anti-graffiti and clean up programs throughout New York City. The same criminal that Time Magazine hired is also in this video game as a so-called "mentor" to novices.

"This punk is going to have an awful lot of money to buy spray paint and destroy our city because of two irresponsible corporate neighbors," stated Vallone.

As a result of this recent publicity Vallone's office received numerous calls from a publisher of a graffiti website http://www.animalnewyork.com, stating that Vallone's name would be tagged throughout the city. The website also provided a link calling Vallone a "punk" and urging people to call his office.

Vallone has doubled the penalties for graffiti and introduced a number of anti-graffiti measures to help fight this quality of life crime. He recently drafted legislation banning the possession of spray paint and

other graffiti tools by anyone under 21 years of age.

Over the last few years there has been a rise in graffiti throughout New York City. The Mayor even highlighted this growing quality of life problem in his State of the City, announcing a major graffiti initiative including creating an 80 member NYPD anti-graffiti task force with coordinators in every precinct.

"Graffiti is the classic example of a gateway crime. It lets crime and lawlessness get its ugly foot in the door," stated Vallone.

The following is the text of a letter sent July 18, 2005 from Peter F. Vallone Jr., Chair - Public Safety Committee of the Council of the City of New York, to Mr. Bruno Bonnell, Chairman and Chief Creative Officer of Atari, Inc., with copies to Mr. Marc Metis, Senior Vice President, Marketing, Atari, Inc., Hon. Eliot Spitzer, Hon. Michael R. Bloomberg, Hon. A. Gifford Miller, Hon. Raymond W. Kelly, Hon. Richard A. Brown, Hon. Robert M. Morgenthau, Hon. Charles J. Hynes, Hon. Robert T. Johnson, and Hon. Daniel M. Donovan, Jr.:

I write concerning your intended release of a video game called "Getting up: Contents Under Pressure" in September 2005. I request that a copy of this game be sent to me so that I may review it. However, based on the advance promotion on your website, it is clear that it would be completely inappropriate for your company to release this "how to manual" for graffiti vandals.

Your website boasts of the following:

-- "A groundbreaking graffiti game play system, designed to sharpen your skills as you tag with aerosol, rollers, markers, paste, stickers and stencils"

-- "Unique 'intuition' system allowing you to find ideal places to tag"

-- "Authentic tags from fifty real life graffiti artists six of whom appear in game as mentors"

-- "Sneak mode -- infiltrate areas and avoid capture as you creep silently through the city"

-- "Create tags in pressure situations"

By copy of this letter, I am requesting that our law enforcement authorities also review this with an eye toward determining whether or not it gives specific instructions on how to commit a crime, which has been considered to be "aiding and abetting" in the past.

Interestingly enough, on your own website a debate is occurring between the criminals on one side who believe your game will result in too many novices spraying graffiti over the "tags" of the veterans, and the punks on the other side who believe that any game that promotes graffiti is a good game. What a wonderful debate you have sponsored! I hope you are very proud of the contribution you have already made to society.

We here in New York City are working diligently to stamp out this scourge of graffiti. I have written legislation which doubles the jail time for these criminals, and a second offense can now result in up to one year in jail. You are personally encouraging children to deface neighborhoods, break the law, and wind up behind bars. This is an appalling lack of

responsibility on your part. If Atari sees fit to profit from criminality, then I will ensure that all law-abiding parents and citizens band together and refuse to allow this or any other Atari product in their homes. If this game is released, it will prove beyond all doubt that there is no depth to which a corporation such as yours will sink in search of profit.

Video Game ’Mods’ Under Scrutiny

With many video games, there’s no "game over" screen, no reason to ever get bored. In a long-standing practice called "modding," fans create their own new chapters, artwork and other twists to extend the lives of their favorite games. Many game makers freely encourage the practice and give away free software tools to help.

But some in the industry are now wondering about the ratings implications posed by mods after a Dutch programmer created one that unlocks a hidden sex level in the violent action game "Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas." After all, video games aren’t like the feature films you see in the theater or get on a DVD. They’re made of software code. They’re malleable.

The Grand Theft Auto mod, called "hot coffee," was developed by Patrick Wildenborg, who made downloads freely available on the Internet about a month ago.

Most major retailers promptly removed the game from store shelves after the Entertainment Software Rating Board, an industry body, changed its rating Wednesday to "adults only" from "mature."

Like souping up car engines or expanding the capacity of TiVo digital video recorders, modding is largely unsolicited and uncompensated.

For most, modding is all about the love of games, not of dollars - though many large publishers have found ways to cash in on the tinkering that can change the way characters appear or add elements the creators hadn’t intended.

Though most mods are written for PC games, it is becoming increasingly popular on consoles.

In 1999, modders turned Half-Life’s "X-Files" world of government conspiracies and alien invasions into Counter-Strike, a multiplayer game that pits soldiers against terrorists. The mod, which remains popular to this day, had completely new maps, weaponry, graphics and sound effects.

Half-Life’s owner, Valve Corp., eventually released Counter-Strike to commercial success. Many workers at the Bellevue, Wash., company are themselves former modders.

"Hot coffee" in many ways is unique among mods because it accessed content left in the game by its maker, Rockstar Games, instead of adding new material, said Jeff Gerstmann, senior editor at the review and news Web site GameSpot.

When the sex scene was discovered, Rockstar initially blamed malicious hackers for the problem but later conceded that the material had been left in the game by its commercial developers.

It depicts the fully clothed lead character having sex with a woman wearing a thong and T-shirt. The mini-game can be won or lost depending on how well players fill up an "excitement meter."

Even though Rockstar admitted the mini-game was hidden in the retail game, the "San Andreas" ratings flap could change the way game companies view mods.

In a statement, the Entertainment Software Rating Board's chief, Patricia Vance, called on the industry to proactively protect games from illegal modifications by third parties, "particularly when they serve to undermine the accuracy of the rating."

But completely stopping modders could to be a near impossible task, said Sid Shuman, an editor for GamePro.com.

"It's something, frankly, that digital entertainment is not really well equipped to deal with. You can't really stop people from making changes," he said. "People will always find where that one file is, and they will always be able to modify it."

Another catch is that the game-development process involves programming concepts or levels that are never fully explored but left in games because altering or removing them could cause other parts to stop working.

"Grand Theft Auto" was released in October with an "M" rating, for players 17 and older. It was last year's top console game, selling more than 5.1 million copies in the U.S., according to market analyst NPD Group. Xbox and PC versions were released last month.

Rockstar has now stopped making that version of "Grand Theft Auto" and is working on secure update that complies with an "M" rating.

In a bit of irony the company is apt not to find amusing, Rockstar says it will also offer a downloadable patch to fix the sexual content in current PC versions.

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Nigeria Jails Woman in $242 Million Email Fraud Case

A Nigerian court has sentenced a woman to two and half years in jail after she pleaded guilty to fraud charges in the country's biggest e-mail scam case, the anti-fraud agency said on Saturday.

Amaka Anajemba, one of three suspects in a $242 million fraud involving a Brazilian bank, would return $48.5 million to the bank, hand over $5 million to the government and pay a fine of 2 million naira ($15,000), the agency said.

Scams have become so successful in Nigeria that anti-sleaze campaigners say swindling is one of the country's main foreign exchange earners after oil, natural gas and cocoa.

Anajemba's sentencing by a Lagos High Court on Friday is the first major conviction since the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) was established in 2003 to crack down on Nigeria's thriving networks of email fraudsters.

The agency said in a statement that the judgment was "a landmark achievement by EFCC in the fight against advance fee fraud, corruption and other related crimes."

Typically fraudsters send out junk e-mails around the world promising recipients a share in a fortune in return for an advance fee. Those who pay never receive the promised windfall.

Anajemba, whose late husband masterminded the swindling of the Sao Paolo-based Banco Noroeste S.A. between 1995 and 1998, was charged along with Emmanuel Nwude and Nzeribe Okoli.

The prosecution said the three accused obtained the $242 million by promising a member of the bank staff a commission for funding a non-existent contract to build an airport in Nigeria's capital Abuja.

All three accused pleaded not guilty, but Anajemba later changed her mind to enter a guilty plea in order to receive a shorter sentence.

Her prison term was backdated to start in January 2004 when she was first taken in custody. The trial of the two others who maintained their not guilty pleas was adjourned to September.

Ranked the world's second most corrupt country after Bangladesh by sleaze watchdog Transparency International, Nigeria has given new powers to the EFCC which is prosecuting about 200 fraud and corruption cases.

The anti-fraud agency has arrested over 200 junk mail scam suspects since 2003. It says it has also confiscated property worth $200 million and secured 10 other convictions.

Next Version of Windows Named 'Vista'

Microsoft Corp. dropped the code name Longhorn on Friday, announcing the next version of its flagship Windows operating system will be called Windows Vista.

The world's largest software maker also said it will release the first of two test versions to developers and information technology professionals by Aug. 3.

The company did not say when it expects to release a second test version to a broader audience, but said it remains on target to ship the oft-delayed update to Windows XP sometime in the second half of next year.

Microsoft gave an internal gathering of its employees in Atlanta the first word about the new name Thursday.

"The core idea around Windows Vista is bringing clarity to the user so they can focus on what matters most," Brad Goldberg, general manager for Windows product management said Friday.

Vista’s features will include better ways to visualize data, such as seeing through windows that are stacked atop each other, more natural file organization and faster searching.

The operating system will also be designed to better protect computers against viruses and spyware.

Windows XP Flaw Exposes Users to Denial-of-Service Attacks

A flaw in Windows XP causing computers to crash and be forced offline escaped Microsoft’s latest round of security patches, according to researchers. After a security group made the vulnerability public, Microsoft warned the announcement could put customers at risk.

The Windows Remote Desktop Service - designed to permit people to access their computers remotely - has a flaw that could allow attackers to launch a denial-of-service (DoS) assault, causing the computer to become unresponsive, according to Security Protocols, the group that announced the flaw.

By default, the service is turned off in Windows, and a firewall should prohibit the DoS attack, according to Microsoft.

Microsoft says it is "aggressively investigating the public reports."

Microsoft has known of the flaw since May, when the vulnerability was brought to the company’s attention, according to Security Protocols. Microsoft said it will release a patch in August for the flaw. The software maker said it has not heard of any Windows XP users falling prey to the security hole.

"Our investigation has determined that this is limited to a denial of service, and therefore an attacker could not use this vulnerability to take complete control of a system," according to a Microsoft advisory released over the weekend.

Security Protocols, which first alerted Microsoft of the vulnerability on May 4, described the flaw as "boring" because it was a hole that opened machines only to denial-of-service attacks.

Earlier this month, Microsoft released a raft of patches for its Internet Explorer and Microsoft Word applications. These fixes were designed to patch what Microsoft termed "critical" vulnerabilities. Unlike the latest Windows Remote Desktop Services flaw, Microsoft announced that attackers were exploiting these software holes actively.

Secunia, a security watchdog based in Denmark, gives the latest Windows security flaw a "moderately critical" rating.

While Microsoft admits the flaw exists, the company decried making the vulnerability public. Now that the flaw is known publicly, Microsoft fears customers are at risk.

In a related announcement, security company Sophos announced a ZombieAlert program, notifying organizations when one of their computers are infected.

Zombie computers often are the source of waves of unsolicited e-mail and denial-of-service attacks. Sophos estimates zombie computers deliver half of the spam users receive.

AOL Delivers AIM Mail

As of today, the 22 million active AOL Instant Messenger users will officially have access to America Online's new AIM Mail service, designed to be seamlessly integrated into the messaging service. The new mail service will allow users to use their AIM Screen Name as their email address and allows up to 2 GB of email storage.

AIM Mail will be instantly accessible once users download the updated version of the AIM 5.9 software. Other tweaks to the messaging service includes an expanded Buddy List feature that can accommodate up to 400 buddy names, can store more contact information for each buddy and allows for double the writing space for "more creative" away messages.

"We are very excited to invite AIM users to activate their AIM Mail accounts, which are ready and available today," Chamath Palihapitiya, AOL vice president and general manager for AIM and ICQ, said. "We are also thanking our users for making their AIM Screen Name a core part of their identity by giving them the chance to win really cool prizes simply by activating their AIM Mail."

The prizes are part of a sweepstakes accompanying the system-wide auto-upgrade that will begin rolling out across the AIM network over the next week. AIM Mail users could win a Starbucks gift card, T-Mobile Sidekick, Apple iPod Shuffle, Sony PlayStation Portable, or, the grand prize - a 2005 MINI Cooper S.

In other AOL news, the company said it's offering its 80 million AOL users unlimited e-mail storage capacity. The upgrade will roll out over a period of a few weeks.

"With unprecedented e-mail storage capacity, our members will be able to keep every single message and attachment they ever receive, if they wish," Mark Greatrex, executive vice president, Access Marketing, AOL said. "Unlimited storage resources will enable members to save and access to all of their e-mail content, attachments and folders, anytime, anywhere, and easily share them with friends and family."

Also, dial-up users will have access to AOL's Multiple Simultaneous Log-Ins feature - allowing for up to seven AOL Screen Names on a single account and the ability to sign into AOL simultaneously from multiple locations.

Both new features will be available to AOL members at no extra charge.

These upgrades comprise a small part of AOL's plans to revamp its services. In addition to having plans to relaunch an improved AOL.com Web site later this summer, the company has, in the past few months, built a browser into AIM, released a developer's tool that allows companies to include AIM into video games, launched a VOIP service and a blog service aimed at teens.

Blue Frog Antispam Tech Targets Spamvertized Sites

Blue Security, a California startup company, believes spammers have gone far enough in poisoning the e-mail experience. Tired of watching the problem grow, the company on Tuesday released "Blue Frog" software to make spammers pay for their bad behavior. But there are questions about the legality of the new approach.

In the natural world, the Blue Frog is so poisonous that its predators leave it alone out of fear of becoming violently ill. Blue Security hopes to apply the same concept to controlling spam, making sending spam so painful that those involved in the business will stop.

"We're really frustrated," said Eran Reshef, Blue Security founder and CEO. "We've had enough and we're not going to put up with it." The startup, founded in 2004, now is offering free downloads of a beta version of its spam-combating client software.

Blue Security's approach uses the carrot-and-stick method to reduce spam. Spammers are asked to adhere to a Do Not Intrude Registry of people who do not wish to receive unwanted e-mail, much like telemarketers are asked to abide by the Do Not Call Registry.

Users of Blue Frog receive a "honeypot" address that Blue Security advertises publicly. When spammers send unwanted e-mail to those addresses, Blue Frog responds with a warning to stop.

If warnings are ignored, the Blue Frogs installed on Blue Community members' machines automatically post complaints on the Web sites advertised by the spammers. For each spam message received by the community, a single complaint is posted. This procedure essentially creates enough disruption - indeed, bordering on a denial-of-service attack - to prevent potential customers from accessing the spammer's Web site.

"Blue Security takes an active approach that deters spammers by interfering with their ability to do business, compelling them to comply with the Registry and stop sending spam to Blue Community members," according to the company.

Offenders have only two options: They can stop sending spam or, if they choose to continue, they will suffer from Blue Frog user complaints. "That's going to make spammers' lives very hard," said Reshef.

Reshef is quick to deny his tactic is illegal or unethical. While some reports suggest that the Blue Frog technology might create a cavalry of antispammers hammering an offender's Web site to the point where it cannot accept any traffic at all, Blue Frog is safe and ethical, said Reshef.

When the software "complains," it is a one-to-one response, according to the company.

Although several previous attempts - including one by Lycos - to stop spammers in this manner have failed, the Blue Frog system identifies the actual spammers, said Reshef.

Two spammers already have downloaded the registry, said Reshef.

"We have to face the fact filters don’t solve the problem," he said. While filters hide spam, the numbers of spam messages still are growing.

"If enough people abandon the idea of passively filtering spam and realize that unrelenting action is required, we can together stand up for our online rights and reclaim the e-mail experience," he said.

New Spam-Fighting Technique Criticized

Escalating the war on spam, a California company wants to let thousands of users collaborate to disable the Web sites spammers use to sell their wares.

A leading anti-spam advocate, however, criticized Blue Security Inc.’s Blue Frog initiative as being no more than a denial-of-service attack, the technique hackers use to effectively shut down a Web site by overwhelming it with fake traffic.

"It’s the worst kind of vigilante approach," said John Levine, a board member with the Coalition Against Unsolicited Commercial E-mail. "Deliberate attacks against people’s Web sites are illegal."

Levine recalled a screen saver program that the Web portal Lycos Europe distributed briefly last year. The program was designed to overwhelm sites identified by Lycos as selling products pitched in spam.

Eran Reshef, Blue Security’s founder and chief executive, denied any wrongdoing, saying Blue Frog was merely empowering users to collectively make complaints they otherwise would have sent individually.

Here’s how the technique works:

o When users add e-mail addresses to a "do-not-spam" list, Blue Security creates additional addresses, known as honeypots, designed to do nothing but attract spam.

o If a honeypot receives spam, Blue Security tries to warn the spammer. Then it triggers the Blue Frog software on a user’s computer to send a complaint automatically.

o Thousands complaining at once will knock out a Web site and thus encourage spammers to stop sending e-mail to the "do-not-spam" list.

Reshef acknowledges that the technique only works if enough users - say, 100,000 - join. The program is initially free, but Reshef said Blue Security might eventually charge new users.

Snap.com Plans to Combat ’Click Fraud’

People scoffed nearly a decade ago when serial entrepreneur Bill Gross proposed an online search engine that ranked results based on how much advertisers were willing to pay to have their links tied to specific requests.

But the concept developed into a revolutionary idea that turned Internet search engines into massive moneymaking machines.

Now Gross hopes to shake things up again with Snap.com, which is providing another commercial twist on search engines while also promising to deliver more useful results than industry leaders Google Inc. and Yahoo Inc.

"We feel there is so much more innovation that can take place in search," Gross said Monday. "It’s hard to say that little Snap will ever beat Google, but I think we can become a viable alternative."

As Snap gears up to shift out of test phase, the search engine’s parent company - Pasadena-based Perfect Market Technologies Inc. - has raised $10 million in a venture capital round led by Mayfield, a Menlo Park firm. Gross and Snap CEO Tom McGovern intend to use some of that money to spread the word about a system that he believes can deliver better value for advertisers.

Google, Yahoo and other search engines make money by distributing sponsored Web links that are tied to a search query or the content displayed on a page. Advertisers pay commissions whenever the commercial links are clicked on, even if the traffic doesn’t result in a sale.

Gross pioneered this "pay-per-click" approach at GoTo.com, which later changed its name to Overture Services before Yahoo bought it for $1.7 billion in 2003. Google introduced its own pay-per-click model, known as AdWords, in 2002.

As it has emerged into a highly effective marketing tool, the pay-per-click system has spawned more mischief, too. Looking for a competitive advantage, some advertisers have repeatedly clicked on a rival’s link in an attempt to drain their marketing budgets. Other rogue Web sites belonging to the ad networks maliciously click on commercial links to generate more commissions for themselves.

The estimates on the prevalence of so-called "click fraud" vary widely. Critics of the system say 10 to 20 percent of the clicks are bogus - done by a person or automated program with no intention of buying something. Others say incidents of fraud are vastly overblown.

Gross is among those who believe click fraud is a big problem. He aims to change things with a "cost per action" system that only charges ad commission when a purchase is actually completed.

"I believe the commercial side of search will evolve toward cost-per-action in the next five to 10 years," Gross said.

Other entrepreneurs also are trying to improve upon ideas they conceived years ago. For example, the co-founders of online price and shopping comparison site MySimon.com are taking another stab at the niche. Michael Yang and Yeogirl Yun recently raised $7.2 million in venture capital to back Become.com, a search engine that pulls together product reviews and prices.

Gross’s record of innovation helped separate Snap from other startups trying to elbow their way into the search engine industry, said Allen Morgan, Mayfield’s managing director.

"It’s kind of like the Big Bang is happening right now," Morgan said. "The

search market is exploding infinitely and in all directions. We feel like it’s opening a pretty interesting opportunity for a company like Snap."

But not all investors admire Gross. After the dot-com bust, a group of prominent investors sued him, alleging he and his wife had been looting their business incubator, Idealab, to support lavish lifestyles. Gross brushed off the complaints as sour grapes, and a judge eventually rejected an attempt to liquidate Idealab so investors could recoup some of their losses.

Morgan, who is joining Snap’s board of directors, is betting Snap can become a more refined search engine alternative - a sort of Target to Google’s Wal-Mart.

But Snap faces a long haul ahead. Mountain View-based Google handled 1.8 billion U.S. search requests last month, giving it a 36.9 percent share of the market, according to comScore Networks. Sunnyvale-based Yahoo ranked second with 1.5 billion U.S. searches, or 30.4 percent of the market. As of Monday, Snap had processed just 16.4 million search requests since its site debuted nine months ago.

Feds Accuse Firms in Porn E-Mail Scheme

Federal regulators accused seven companies Wednesday of hiring others to send illegal e-mails with pornographic messages to tempt consumers to visit adult Internet sites.

The government said four of the firms already agreed to pay nearly $1.2 million to settle the charges, making it among the most aggressive government crackdowns on pornographic e-mail operations.

The Federal Trade Commission described the practice as "electronic flashing" and said at least some of the unwanted e-mails were sent to children. The threat of children unwittingly receiving smut in their inboxes helped drive the U.S. government to impose restrictions on sending commercial e-mails last year.

The FTC said the messages were not prominently marked "sexually explicit," did not include instructions for consumers to block future e-mails and did not include a postal address, all required under federal law.

Consumers complained about receiving the pornographic e-mails and forwarded copies of the troublesome messages to a special e-mail address set up by the FTC (spam(at)uce.gov), said Jonathan M. Kraden, an attorney with the agency’s Bureau of Consumer Protection. "We received thousands of messages," Kraden said.

The FTC said the seven companies did not send e-mails directly to consumers but operated affiliate programs, paying others to send unwanted messages to drive Internet traffic to adult Web sites. The FTC said under the "Can Spam" law, defendants in such cases are liable because they paid others to send e-mails on their behalf.

The government said investigators from Microsoft Corp. helped track the companies. Microsoft, which operates its MSN online subscription service and offers free "Hotmail" e-mail accounts, analyzed the pornographic sites advertised in the unwanted e-mails to identify the companies responsible,

the FTC said.

The FTC said it directed the Justice Department to file civil lawsuits against three of the companies: T.J. Web Productions LLC of Henderson, Nev.; Cyberheat Inc. of Tucson, Ariz.; and Impulse Media Group Inc. of Seattle. The lawsuits seek unspecified payment to the government for "every violation" of the federal anti-spam law.

The attorney for T.J. Web Productions, Lawrence G. Walters of Altamonte Springs, Fla., said the company was still negotiating with the Justice Department. Walters said there were "legitimate concerns and legal variables" over the government's claims. "If necessary, our client is prepared to litigate those issues," he said.

Executives with Cyberheat did not return telephone messages left by The Associated Press. An executive with Impulse Media Group, Seth Schermerhorn, declined to comment immediately.

The FTC said four of the companies agreed to settle cases against them. BangBros.com Inc. of Miami agreed to pay $650,000; MD Media of Bingham Farms, Mich., agreed to pay $238,743; APC Entertainment Inc. of Davie, Fla., will pay $220,000; and Pure Marketing Solutions LLC of Miami and Internet Matrix Technology of New Orleans will together pay $50,000, the FTC said.

The attorney for MD Media, Danny E. Adams of Kelley Drye in Washington, did not immediately respond to a phone call and e-mail request for comment. The phone numbers listed on Internet records for BangBros.com and Pure Marketing Solutions were disconnected, and the companies did not respond to e-mail requests for comment. Executives for APC Entertainment did not respond to a telephone message from the AP.

Internet Jargon Confuses Consumers, Says Pew Study

Faced with technology buzzwords like "RSS" and "podcasting," many Americans are responding with a blank stare, according to a new study by the Pew Internet and American Life Project.

Although only 3 percent of Internet users do not know such security terms as spam, spyware or firewall, a full 70 percent of users are unaware that "phishing" refers to the threat of fraudulent e-mail that can cause people to disclose their private financial information.

The survey found an even higher level of unfamiliarity with other emerging terms. More than 90 percent of Internet users are unsure what RSS, or Really Simple Syndication, is, while 87 percent of survey participants said they were not sure what "podcasting" was all about.

"The findings are another reminder that new and exciting technology developments that seize the interest of industry officials and journalists, such as podcasting and RSS feeds, usually take a while to register in the wider public," said Lee Raine, director of the Pew study.

As in previous surveys about consumer knowledge of the Internet, the study found men more than women and younger more than older users were likely to be aware of new terminology.

In addition, the survey found, not surprisingly, that users who spend more time on the Internet have a greater chance of understanding current Internet jargon.

The confusion over terminology is causing some companies to reword their marketing to consumers, said Su Li Walker, consumer analyst with the Yankee Group.

While Yahoo makes RSS feeds available through its My Yahoo service, the search engine describes it as continual updating of headlines.

Cable providers that are marketing Voice over IP, or VoIP, shy away from using the term in advertising, instead preferring "digital voice" to describe phone calls routed across the Internet.

To overcome the barrier associated with understanding these terms, companies are placing less emphasis on the technical descriptions and more on the services provided by these technologies.

"The benefits need to be described," said Walker. For example, while RSS leans heavily on technical jargon, once its benefits are described, users warm up to the concept, explained the analyst.

Clearly, refusing to interpret for consumers the benefits of technology laden with jargon can harm a business. "Consumers might turn away from technology," said Walker.

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